

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4921

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL PERTH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 2427

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJ: POSSIBLE NEW SOUTH WALES (NSW) GENERAL ELECTION

REF: SYDNEY 1747, 2315, 2357

SUMMARY: THERE IS STRONG LIKELIHOOD THAT PREMIER ASKIN WILL SHORTLY CALL FOR A GENERAL ELECTION IN NSW TO BE HELD BEFORE THE END OF NOVEMBER, THEREBY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE FAVORABLE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE FOR THE LIBERAL/COUNTRY PARTY COALITION CREATED BY LIBERAL SUCCESSES IN BY-ELECTIONS, REDUCED FEDERAL ALP PRESTIGE AND PUBLIC IRRITATION WITH NUMEROUS STRIKES IN SYDNEY.

1. SPECULATION OVER THE PAST THREE MONTHS OF A POSSIBLE GENERAL ELECTION IN NSW IS REACHING A CRESCENDO AND SUGGESTS LIKELIHOOD THAT PREMIER SIR ROBERT ASKIN WILL CALL FOR AN ELECTION TO BE HELD NOVEMBER 17 OR 24. POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN NSW IS HIGHLY FAVORABLE FOR LIBERAL/COUNTRY PARTY COALITION, AS EVIDENCED BY SUCCESSES IN BY-ELCTIONS OVER RECENT MONTHS, FALL IN
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PUBLIC PRESTIGE OF FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT AS REFLECTED

IN POLLS AND PRESS, BUT ESPECIALLY CUMULATIVE IRRITATION IN N.S.W. WITH ANNOYING STRIKES IN PUBLIC SERVICE INDUSTRIES SUCH AS ELECTRIC POWER GENERATION, AIRPORT COMMUNICATIONS, POSTAL SERVICE, COMMUTER TRAIN SERVICE AND OTHERS.

2. PRESIDENT OF NSW BRANCH OF LABOR PARTY, MR. JOHN DUCKER, PRIVATELY SAID YESTERDAY THAT HE ANTICIPATES AN ELECTION AND "ASKIN WOULD BE FOOLISH IF HE DID NOT REPEAT NOT CALL AN ELECTION AT THIS TIME. IT IS JUST BARELY POSSIBLE LABOR MIGHT SQUEAK THROUGH BUT PROBABLY THE LIBERALS WOULD DEFEAT US." IN DUCKERS VIEW NOVEMBER 17 WOULD BE THE POSSIBLE DATE BUT THIS WOULD REQUIRE ASKIN TO MAKE HIS ANNOUNCEMENT BY THIS WEEKEND DURING VISIT OF QUEEN ELIZABETH. THERE ARE DIFFERING OPINIONS AS TO WHETHER ASKIN WOULD REGARD THIS AS A DISADVANTAGE BUT IF SO ANNOUNCEMENT COULD BE POSTPONED A WEEK AND ELECTION SET FOR NOVEMBER 24.

3. FOLLOWING ASKIN'S RECENT MEETING WITH FEDERAL OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN, IT HAS BEEN SPECULATED THAT SNEDDEN'S PRESUMED DECISION AGAINST CALLING A SNAP ELECTION LEFT THE WAY OPEN FOR ASKIN TO CALL A STATE ELECTION. IF LIBERAL/COUNTRY PARTY DOES AS WELL AS EXPECTED IN N.S.W., THIS WILL SIGNIFICANTLY STRENGTHEN THE PROSPECTS OF THE FEDERAL OPPOSITION IN A POSSIBLE FEDERAL ELECTION SHOULD ONE BE CALLED NEXT YEAR.

4. THE LAST OF THE RECENT MAJOR LABOR DISPUTES, ELECTRICITY WORKERS, IS FADING AWAY RAPIDLY WITH THE STATE LABOR PARTY BEATING AS GRACEFUL A RETREAT AS POSSIBLE. UNIONS ARE PROVIDING ALMOST FULL ELECTRIC POWER GENERATION HAVING AGREED TO FOCUS THEIR DEMAND FOR A 35 HOUR WEEK ON A COMBINATION OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN IN ANTICIPATED NSW ELECTION AND ACTU APPLICATION TO COMMONWEALTH ARBITRATION COMMISSION. IN UNLIKELY EVENT STATE ALP SHOULD WIN STATE ELECTION, A NEW LABOR GOVERNMENT UNDER PAT HILLS WOULD GRANT THE 35 HOUR WEEK TO POWER WORKERS. IN MORE LIKELY EVENT OF ALP ELECTION DEFEAT, PAT HILLS WOULD PROBABLY BE DUMPED AS OPPOSITION LEADER, POSSIBLY IN FAVOR OF NEVILLE WRAN.

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IN THIS CASE THE ACTU APPLICATION FOR THE 35 HOUR WEEK WOULD REPRESENT SECOND STRING TO LABOR'S BOW SINCE A FEDERAL GRANT OF 35 HOUR WEEK TO POWER WORKERS IN OTHER STATES WOULD PROBABLY RESULT IN "FLOW-ON" TO NSW WHICH, IN FACT, HAS ALREADY BEEN ANTICIPATED BY PREMIER ASKIN. HANNAH

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